

Thank you very much, my fellow members of the General Assembly. It is my sincere pleasure and honor to be with you. Madame Chief Justice, it's the first time I've had the opportunity to say that Madame Secretary, my fellow members of the 119th General Assembly and we have many guests here today, some of which I'll recognize. We have a lot of family and friends here, and it's my pleasure, my honor and privilege to be before you today as the Speaker of the 119th General Assembly.

As I pledged in the past and I've pledged again to Representative Pelath, I will do my very best to treat each of you with fairness regardless of where you're from or what party you're affiliated with, and to uphold the Constitution and laws and the rules of this Chamber to the best of my ability.

I want to extend a special welcome to family members, especially newly-elected members, and it's a very exciting day for families. I just thanked my wife, Cheryl, for holding the Bible that my Mom and Dad read 60 years ago every night when they were members of Emmaus Lutheran Church where Pastor Ruiz is from. Cheryl, I want to thank you on behalf of all the family members here of being on the home team for the elected officials that give to this institution. This is truly a family sport, and we thank you all and Cheryl, I thank you especially. So let's recognize all of our families.

My staff is wonderful at bringing up unusual facts to me, and it's been pointed out to me that I have the unique perspective today of being only the second person in this Chamber's history that as Speaker has addressed this General Assembly and this House of Representatives 10 years apart. I looked at what I said before you – and whether you know it or not, these things are recorded in the journal – 10 years ago and thought it would be a fairly interesting exercise for me to look back and see where we've come and where we've achieved things and areas we still need to improve.

Ironically, I suggested at that time that we needed to fix our eyes on 10 years down the line and try to make Indiana what we wanted it to be, and to take steps in that direction. So, how did we do? Where did we do well? What needs to be improved?

In 2004, I announced something that was shocking at the time. In fact, I was told it couldn't be done, and that was to balance our state budget without gimmicks in the face of a \$1.75 billion deficit and holdback from local units of government and schools without a tax increase, despite the tax increase that the governor at the time asked for. Ladies and gentleman, many of you were in the Chamber, we worked on it together and we did it.

I promised in that first speech unprecedented rules changes, which seemed quaint in retrospect now. For the first time in institutional memory we were going to force people to sit in committees when they cast their vote and not sit in some other location, perhaps not even in this building, as a chairman cast their vote by proxy. I pledged that

we would put microphones in committee rooms so the public could actually hear what was being discussed.

For those of you who have been around for a while - I pledged something that others shook their head about, and that was that the public and each of us would have the state's most important document, our state budget, for 24 hours before we voted on it. Now, some of you will remember the day when we were handed 300 red hot pages, hot off the copying machines here, and told to vote on a budget that we hadn't even reviewed.

We limited the number of bills that were introduced to reduce the paper and the clutter here. We made members vote in this Chamber for themselves, and we took the unprecedented step of placing our own debate, and then the debate and vote in every committee on the Internet. We made those pledges in 2004 and 2005 and we did them.

But we made bigger policy changes as well that weren't so easy, but were equally important to restore public trust in this institution. Like repealing life-time health care for legislators at public expense and installing an Inspector General that has addressed at a lot of corruption and crime, especially in local government.

In 2004, we dragged the nation in job creation and led the nation in job loss. While job creation and economic circumstance as far from perfect today, we're essentially the envy of the nation both as to job creation and on the fiscal front, with one of the few triple-A bond ratings, which was a far cry from what we had 10 years ago, and the nation's second-largest financial reserve, our buffer against future tax increases and cuts.

We're rated number one in the Midwest by a dozen different rating agencies from The Tax Foundation to the recent Business Facilities Magazines "Best Business Climate," "Best Automotive Manufacturing Climate," "Best Medical Device Climate" and "Best Infrastructure" in the nation.

The Bureau of Labor and Statistics announced about six weeks ago that through our efforts, not one party or the other, not the executive alone, but through the legislative efforts of this Chamber, and our colleagues across the hall, we had the second largest gain in personal income, adjusted for cost of living, in the nation in 2012.

We might not have been unanimous in all those policies that were adopted, but it was a bipartisan effort, even by the no-voters to change things. The policies we've dealt with over the last 10 years are working and they're working for Hoosier families.

Speaking of Hoosier families, 10 years ago, Hoosier families of low income had no choice as to where their children could go to school. They went to the classroom that they were assigned to by their local school corporation. Today, low-income families have school choice, and we have public school charters that are making gains and some that need improvement.

In short, as I look where we were 10 years ago, and think about where we are today, a lot has improved, but much remains to be done.

In this coming session, once again, our primary focus will be relying on our folks on Ways and Means to produce an honestly balanced budget that meets our strategic needs, with no tax increases, and makes investments that are strategic in job creation, work skills improvement, technical and career education, and yet still focuses on less bureaucracy and smaller government.

And there's no more critical strategic investment for us this session of the General Assembly than K-12 education and K-12 education funding. You've heard us say it before: we're going to take a hard look at the disparities in urban, suburban and rural school funding and look for solutions. Progress on money following the child has to be made. Now I acknowledge that's not going to be an easy task, and it will be a parochial one, because it impacts each one of our school corporations, but it must be done.

I think there's a solution here and it's requiring state funds to go where we know they are most effective – to classrooms. Retaining and attracting the best and brightest to the profession of education. We have to fund students, and through those students, fund teachers rather than funding institutions.

And we have challenges on this front. On average our school corporations spend about 40 percent of the money we send them on administrative costs, and some are very important and must be done. But rather than those administrative costs, we need to be concentrating resources on the single most important element of student success and that is motivated teachers.

In our schools collectively, administrative cost increases have outpaced increases for certified teacher expenditures, and they far outpaced growth in student achievement as well, and that is the frontier we need to turn to this session.

You know people say frequently, "Put your money where your mouth is," and I am going to offer two small tokens of putting money – the state's money, our money – where my mouth is right now. The first is an effort to compensate teachers directly without the administrative middleman, and the second is an effort to cut administrative costs this session.

The House Republicans, and I hope the House Democrats, will work together to champion the first teacher tax credit for every public school teacher that purchases supplies for their classroom. While it's small, and I am sure the budgeteers will cut it back based on whatever fiscal forecast that we face, it is critical that we acknowledge that teachers bring that personal sacrifice to the classroom and we can give those funds back without the administrative middleman.

The second are incentives and funding for those school districts, some with just 500 students, that are willing to streamline or combine their efforts with others to cut administrative expenses. Those proposals I hope are just the beginning of our discussion

about getting money to the classroom, where we know the most important element in that school child's day is their teacher.

While a lot of folks have tried to paint a different picture – some about Republicans, some about leadership in the House – regarding our respect for teachers, I'm going to tell you from my heart, with Cheryl and I having 12 licensed teachers, some retired, in our immediate family - we know firsthand that teachers are not the problem, teachers are the solution.

We have to treat teachers as professional faculty and free them from regulatory burdens and bureaucratic control to do the job that they desire so much to do. We will take this legislation head on this session.

I made a note about a great speech I heard where it was stated that high standards, accountability, incentives, innovation and creativity, those five critical elements are present for excellence in almost every aspect of life. These are also the core characteristics of successful advancement of education policy in this state, I truly believe. We have made a lot of progress on standards and accountability – maybe some would say too much – but incentives, innovation and creativity are wanting.

I've asked a special group of folks to be with us today that are going to serve as my personal kitchen cabinet on this very issue, and that I hope are going to help us address the issue of professionalism, treating teachers as faculty and allowing innovation and creativity in the classroom. They are the folks that we have selected as a state as the most creative and fore-thinking teachers.

I've invited the Teachers of the Year for the last decade to join us and many of them could make it today. I am going to introduce them, they are going to stand at the top, we'll clap for them all at once perhaps.

First of all, the 2004 Teacher of the Year, Mark Weaver from Clay Middle School in Carmel; the 2005 Teacher of the Year, Molly Seward from New Augusta Elementary in Pike; the 2006 Teacher of the Year, Louisa LaGrotto from Westlane Middle School in Washington Township; the 2010 Teacher of the Year, Byron Ernest from Hoosier Academies; the 2013 Teacher of the Year, Suzanne Whitton from Delaware Trail Elementary School in Brownsburg; the 2014 Teacher of the Year, my friend, Steven Perkins from North Central High School, Washington Township; and the 2015 Teacher of the Year, Kathy Nimmer from Harrison High School in West Lafayette. Thank you all for joining us today.

We'll be calling on this group to offer thoughts and opinions – and believe me I've met with them, they have some – about how best to bring excellence, innovation and creativity to every Hoosier classroom and for every Hoosier student. One thing that we can agree on, if we agree on nothing else, is that a great teacher is the single most important indicator of success for each student. Thank you for agreeing to this task, and we'll be calling on you frequently.

We've also committed to address several critical public safety issues this session, including adequately funding the community corrections requirements of House Bill 1006, addressing the issues of heroin and meth that are hurting all of our communities, whether we're urban, suburban or rural, addressing the high infant mortality rate that this state suffers from and also emphasizing the needs of programs designed to address victims of domestic violence.

We started that effort this morning as Representative Pelath and I kicked off our collective campaign of support for domestic violence shelters throughout the state with representatives of the Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence. We have Laura Berry and Curtis McManus who are with us, Laura and Curtis, right here. Thank you for your words this morning.

And thank you to the staff and members who made a special effort to bring donations for shelters, the 49 programs and 27 shelters throughout the state. We will continue collecting those donations and also have a service project and some other emphasis on domestic violence prevention throughout this session.

That's a pretty long list of issues, but I have one more that I want to briefly talk about. Ten years ago, in that speech in 2004, I highlighted my intention to make government more accountable, more business-like, more transparent for every Hoosier. As I mentioned then and I reiterate now, that is critical to protecting public trust in elected officials- and we have more work to do. The four legislative leaders have met and we are united in our commitment to strengthen disclosure and transparency in the private dealings of our citizen legislators, and strengthening our rules on removing ourselves from participation in the process, both publicly and privately, when we have a unique, direct and material interest in any matter before the General Assembly.

We are already consulting national ethics experts, trying to find the state of the art for part-time legislatures around the country and we are going to make it happen. Representative Steuerwald and Representative Kersey will be scheduling the second meeting of the Ethics Committee on these topics in December. It's an issue that will receive my personal attention and I know it will receive Representative Pelath's, as well as Senator Long's and Senator Lanane's, because I said just a moment ago, public trust in the legislative process has to be our highest and primary priority.

I have spent a good bit of time reflecting on what inspires people to do what they do. Some of you have been here for quite a while, and I suppose I'm in that category, as well. For me, it's my faith, it's my family, it's a long-time family commitment to public service. While we tend to focus on our own inspiration, I really like to focus on the inspiration of others.

I haven't shared this story before, because I can't get through it without tearing up, but I'm going to try to do it right now. It's a story about a friend of mine, former Master Sergeant Jeffrey Mittman. I met Jeff two years ago when he was invited to serve on a charitable foundation that a group of us founded 26 years ago, Bosma Industries for the Blind, and Jeff was invited to participate on the board.

He was an Indianapolis High School guy, joined the Army in 1989, wanted to pay for college – didn't think his folks should have to pay for that – and he wanted to see the world. So after 9/11, the 101st Airborne was sent on four different combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Jeff served without incident.

Now on July 7, 2005, Jeff was driving an armored vehicle with his crew and an Iraqi interpreter in it, because the normal driver had been injured that week. They came off a ramp – and it's amazing, it's like pulling off a highway ramp here in Indiana – right into a fire storm. During that fire storm, an IED went off, shot through the six inch, bullet-proof window of the vehicle that Jeff was driving and exited out the other side. And, to hear Jeff tell the story, his left eye, most of his right eye, his nose and his teeth went with it and his arm was permanently injured.

He woke up a month later in Washington, D.C. in a hospital with his wife at his side – 12 surgeries down, 28 more to go. His biggest concern was how he was going to provide for his family, but an even bigger concern was how his five-year-old daughter was going to react to his dramatically altered appearance. Her response was to climb up on his lap, hold his face and say, "I still see daddy in there."

When Jeff tells this story as he has done all over the country – mostly to veterans that are disabled, many that have been blinded – and the blind and visibly impaired people, generally to inspire them and to overcome. He tells this story and throughout it he says, "I am the luckiest man in the room." And he means it.

As he slowly regains his independence, his life is dedicated to serving others and as he tells them, "There is a solution to every problem; you just have to find it." That's a Hoosier story. That story is just one of a million inspirational stories of the people we serve and what they do to serve every day.

My lesson from Master Sergeant Mittman is: there is a solution to every problem before us, ladies and gentlemen; we just have to find it. I commit to you that I will do my very best to work with each of you to find those solutions in the coming two years. I ask for God's blessing on our effort to do that, and for him to bless all Hoosiers through our efforts. Thank you very much.